because he couldn't face the truth about himself? He rolled up to his knees and pulled the Vulcan's hand forcibly to his temple, shoved the ugly image to the front of his mind.

"Look at it, Spock. See what I'm really like." His voice was ugly. It sounded as if he wanted to hurt Spock with his ugliness.

Lightly, lightly, the fingers touched their precise contact points and Kirk held the image spotlighted while all his self shrank away from it. He experienced a doubled vision as Spock also contemplated the ugliness--the berserk animal lust, the murderous fury, the specific threat. Kirk cringed into a corner of his mind waiting for the hurt, the anger, the withdrawal. Dray's death, Spock's death, all his fault.

The contact strengthened; the tentative touch firmed.

"Fear is not unforgivable. That is what I feared."

"And lies?" Kirk threw the memory at Spock--himself turning away, not speaking the truth he owed. His mind magnified it, hall of mirrors, a hundred Kirks turning away from truth, accepting the sacrifice they did not deserve, betraying the trust. It was uglier far than his image of the bestial Spock driven past knowledge of what he did. He turned away, breaking the contact, said aloud, "I didn't want you to know."

Spock sighed. "I can forgive anything, bear anything except your pain." He spoke as if he sounded something deep inside himself, words falling like stones into the depths until a faint, final echo confirmed the truth. "You are my weakness. I cannot bear to see you hurt."

Kirk gave a bleak, humorless bark of laughter. "Then close your eyes," and softer, half command half appeal, "close your eyes."

He pushed the Vulcan back, straightened the tense figure out. There was no comfort on the bare floor but the warmth of their two bodies. It would have to be enough. Spock yielded blindly to his touch, shudders of tension shaking him, stretching every muscle in high relief. The wasting and fever in the lean figure frightened Kirk. He leaned forward and kissed Spock's face, his lover's face. However imperfectly, with whatever codicils, conditions and reservations, he did love Spock. As much as he could love.

Kirk's thighs were shaking, his testicles drawn achingly tight against his body as he straddled Spock. When he looked down, sweat dropped from his face to Spock's belly. His own penis hung slack, detumescent over Spock's arching shaft. Kirk touched himself with one hand, trying to ease the ache, rouse some feeling, touched Spock with the other. A drop of fluid seeped from the tip of the leaf-green organ, and the Vulcan groaned and thrust up in Kirk's hand, the soft skin sliding over the horn-hard engorgement within.

Kirk parted himself and guided the green spear to snug, sure entrance. Take what you need, he'd told Spock, and Spock couldn't. He forced his unwilling body down, down, until the tip of the cock seemed knocking against his heart, triggering the gag reflex at the back of his throat.

He tightened around Spock's cock, made a slow, erotic circle of his hips, lifted almost off the throbbing shaft and impaled himself again. Spock raised his knees to support Kirk and braced himself tremors easing, lean body gathering power. Kirk moved again, taking the pain, glad of it. Damn the body, body so bent on survival it betrayed him before their loving was one night old. He didn't want pleasure. He ground his ass against Spock's pelvis in an agony of remorse for what he could not give

Spock's lips were parted, slightly swollen, his nostrils flared, brows frowning and eyes narrowed to slits. Kirk thought he saw his reflection there before Spock's head sagged back and his spine arched up, up, driving his cock deep into Kirk's body.

Reason left them, and strength beyond reason flooded through them as they fought for the ultimate possession of mate and life. Spock rolled them over, heedless of anything but the need to thrust, again and again into the satin depths that clutched him. Frantically he lifted and turned Kirk's body, ramming himself deeper and deeper inside. Kirk was split, sundered and tumbled through space. Spock's fire filled him so that his own fingers became claws, nails ripping down Spock's back, teeth drawing blood.

And it wasn't enough. The desperate, driving invasion of his body faltered and began again, but weaker. The electric, paralyzing pain of Spock's steel inside him, Spock's fire filling him was not enough. They clung on the edge of release and could not achieve it.

Kirk was sobbing, cursing, his respiratory system on overload, his heart trying to batter itself out of his body, his strength welling out like blood.

Come, damn you.

Spock thrust again, and it hurt less, they were losing the sensation, dying for lack of it. The Vulcan flinched from the thought, tried to push him away. Kirk fought back, refusing to die like this, bloodied puppet in an insane universe that made Spock want what could not satisfy him, refused to let Spock die. He drove himself down on Spock, leaned forward, clasped Spock's sides with his knees, locked ankles behind him. He pulled Spock close.

Now, Spock, it has to be now. He bit down through Spock's lower lip and blood filled his mouth.

A whisper, a silken touch deeper in his mind than his body, a sweet, sensuous surge, approached, drew back, them foamed through him, transmuting pain to pleasure to joy.

His blood scalded him, running hot as the Vulcan's through his veins. Shock waves of firey pleasure battered his mind and body. Fire became his element. His breath turned the air glassy with heat; his hair curled away in a corona of flame from his scalp, beneath his arms, between his legs. He could not hold tight enough, drive hard enough, take enough, give enough, pierce or be pierced enough. Barriers shimmered and fled. He saw himself as Spock saw him. No mirror had ever given him that bright, doomed beauty, shown him that young god cast down and sweating out the terms of his humanity. Far away he heard his own unimportant denial, but his body became imperishable crystal, filled with light. Canon of proportion, he stood spread eagledacross the starlanes, shedding light.

Eons, ages later he was mortal again. The frail wrapper of his body stung and ached. Beside him Spock lay sleeping, free at last of fever, pain and fear. I freed him, thought Kirk. He had